

Abstract

Parents may have as many as three choices for which type of kindergarten program to enroll their child. These choices include all-day every-day, alternate-day, or half day kindergarten. This paper compares the reasons that parents choose one program over another. Even though parents felt that the consistency of every-day kindergarten would be beneficial, seventy percent of alternate-day parents chose that program because the cost of all-day every-day was too high. Cost was the single most deciding factor for program choice.

key words: kindergarten, alternate-day, comparison, parent choice

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Which kindergarten program should I choose for my child? Many parents who have children entering kindergarten wrestle with the decision of whether to send their child to a full-day every-day kindergarten program or an alternate-day kindergarten program. How do they make their choice? Families may have several options to consider in their school district. Many factors influence their program choice such as whether or not they work out of their homes, stay home with their child, and what kind of a schedule they think their child is ready to handle.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to discover the influences and reasons parents prefer a specific kindergarten program for their children. Some children attend a full-day every-day kindergarten program, while others attend either a half-day or alternate-day kindergarten program. A full-day every-day program consists of attending school five days a week, all day for six and a half hours each day. A half-day program requires children to attend school for approximately two and a half hours daily, five days a week. In the half-day program, children attend kindergarten in either the morning, or afternoon. The students who attend an alternate-day program typically attend school on Mondays and Wednesdays for six and a half hours, or Tuesdays and Thursdays for six and a half hours. The students also attend every other Friday for six and a half hours.

Data were collected using a mixed methods study. A questionnaire was presented to all parents of kindergarten students who attend one of two kindergarten programs in a chosen school district of 1740 students. The programs include all-day-every-day

kindergarten (ADED) and alternate-day kindergarten (ALT). Those completing the questionnaire were included in the study. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended and closed questions.

There are two elementary schools in the district that was researched. One school contains two sections of alternate-day kindergarten. The other school consists of six sections of kindergarten. Two are all-day-every-day and four sections meet on alternate-days.

Background

Students who attend a full-day kindergarten receive greater benefits than children who attend a half-day program (Martinez, Stuber, & Snider, 2006). What about the comparison of a full-day program to an alternate-day program? Do parents feel differently about this choice because the children will go to school all day, but only 2-3 days per week, compared to a half-day program where the children attend school every day but for a shorter amount of time?

Many parents feel that their child is not ready to spend a full day away from home during their kindergarten year of school due to fatigue (Martinez et al., 2006). This study is important because most of the research found compares half-day kindergarten programs to full-day kindergarten programs. This research, however, will show a comparison between alternate-day kindergarten programs and full-day every-day kindergarten programs. The participants shared their reasons for choosing one program instead of the other.

Setting

The setting for this study is a school district near the city of Duluth, in northeastern Minnesota with two elementary schools. One elementary school is located in the city and contains grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The rural elementary school in this study contains grades kindergarten through second grade. The rural school contains two sections of alternate-day kindergarten with 33 students. The city school consists of six sections of kindergarten with 105 students, two sections all-day-every-day and four sections alternate days. The students in this district are 94% white at the K-5 school in the city, and 99% white at the K-2 school in the rural setting. The school in the city has 31% of children on free and reduced lunch, and the rural school has 16% of children on free and reduced lunch. The K-5 city school has 12% of children with special needs. The K-2 rural school has 8% of children with special needs. A nearby school in another district was closed the year of this study and some of those students have enrolled into the school district being studied. This may change the demographics of the district under study for this year.

The focus of the questionnaire is on the program choices parents make in the school district for kindergarten students in both the all-day-every-day and alternate-day kindergarten programs. They are a subset of the target population because they can answer questions about kindergarten due to the fact that they are parents of children who are currently kindergarten students.

The questionnaire was sent home to all parents of kindergarten children in this district. Returning the questionnaire established consent for participants. The

questionnaires for parents were sent home in their children's daily folders with return envelopes to seal in before returning them to school.

Assumptions

The researcher is a kindergarten teacher. She has been teaching for 14 years, and teaching kindergarten for eight years. The researcher believes that a full-day every-day kindergarten gives children the best opportunity to solidify the skills needed to advance to first grade. In fact, she has chosen full-day kindergarten programs for both of her own children. The strong belief the researcher has in the benefits of a full-day every-day kindergarten program may be brought into this study. It is important to the researcher to explore the reasons parents choose a part-time program over a full-time kindergarten program. The knowledge gained from this study will guide the researcher's answers when parents ask which program to choose for their child.

Because the researcher favors a full-day every-day program, the questions may be biased. In an effort to identify and remove bias, the researcher will ask two peers to review the questions. In addition, the researcher must be careful when interpreting open-ended questions so that personal bias does not interfere with the interpretation.

Limitations

This study explores the reasoning and perceptions of parents on why they prefer one type of kindergarten program over another. The participants included are parents who have children currently enrolled in kindergarten in this particular school district. Other school districts may have a varying percentage of children on free and reduced lunch, special needs, and different spoken languages. The responses to the questionnaire are limited to those who return it and not all who are invited will fill it out. Therefore, results

may be further limited. This research might not be replicable to other districts due to limited sample size and specific geography.

Definitions

There are three types of kindergarten programs that schools may choose from. These choices include full-day, half-day, and alternate-day kindergarten programs.

- In the full-day program, students attend school Monday through Friday from the beginning of the day until the end of the school day.
- The second type is half-day. In the half-day kindergarten program, the students attend school every day, but only in either the mornings or afternoons.
- The third type of program is the alternate-day kindergarten program. In the alternate-day program, the students can attend all day on Monday and Wednesday, or Tuesday and Thursday, and every other Friday.

Because school districts choose which types of programs to offer, the programs that are offered may vary from one school district to the next.

Summary

This study seeks to find the reasons or perceptions parents use to choose different kindergarten programs for their children. It will identify benefits that parents feel their child receives from each type of program. Specifically, two types of programs will be compared. The full-day kindergarten program will be compared to the alternate-day kindergarten program. The parents who return questionnaires will answer open-ended and closed questions. This information will be used to determine why the parents indicate they prefer one type of kindergarten program over the other.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

There are a variety of different reasons parents select all day or half-day kindergarten for their children. Single parent and dual income families have increased. According to the U.S. Department Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration website, 63.5% of mothers with children younger than six are working or looking for a job (2007). Schools are looking for ways to address the national and state demands to “increase student achievement” (Albrecht & Carnes, 2007, p. 64). The purpose of this review was to examine the social and academic success of children in a full-day kindergarten program compared to the success of the children in a half-day kindergarten program (Martinez et al., 2006). Since a half-day program is similar to an alternate-day program, the researcher focused on this comparison for this literature review. The researcher was unable to find literature comparing an alternate-day kindergarten program to a full-day every-day kindergarten program. Half-day and alternate-day programs are similar because in both programs, the child is attending school half as much as a student in a full-day kindergarten program. This review will discuss the literature from the perspective of the teachers and parents, behavior effects, and the curriculum of all-day and half-day kindergarten programs.

Types of Programs

While there are three types of programs in use by various districts across the country, there is limited research available on the alternate-day kindergarten program. Yet more and more schools are changing their part time programs to alternate-day rather

than half-day due to transportation costs (Coleman, 2006). Therefore, the two types of programs discussed in this literature review are all-day and half-day kindergarten programs. Bell and da Costa (2001) state that an all-day kindergarten program consists of kindergarten age children attending school five full-day sessions per week. These full day programs can be from 4.5 to 6 hours each day. Half-day sessions can be four or five half-days per week, lasting 2-3 hours per day (Ackerman, Barnett, & Robin, 2005).

Benefits of Full-Day Kindergarten

“Today, more than 60 percent of kindergartners are enrolled in a full-day program,” (Ackerman et al., 2005, p. 2). One benefit of a full-day kindergarten includes a slower paced day for the children (Carter, Creswell & deAlba, 2004). Teachers are able to give students more attention and provide individualized instruction, since they only have one class to focus on and prepare for success. Teachers can “provide more of the experiences necessary to socialize and educate students” (Antifaeff et al., 2006, p. 5). This is compared to the half-day kindergarten teachers who have two classes to manage. Teachers of half-day or alternate-day programs are assigned two different groups of children which double the number of relationships they need to establish and the information they need to assimilate for parent involvement. The teachers of the full-day program know the children and parents better since they spend more time with them.

Children in a full-day kindergarten program are not referred for special education services as often as those in the half-day programs (Martinez et al., 2006). In addition, children are less likely to be retained if they attend a full-day kindergarten program (Albrecht & Carnes, 2007). While research supports the benefits of attending a full-day

kindergarten program, the benefits, even though they contain some "methodological weakness "fade as children grow older" (Ackerman et al., 2005, p. 8).

Finally, much of the research shows that children who attend a full-day kindergarten program exhibit greater growth and are more prepared for first grade, compared to children who attend a half-day program (Bell & da Costa, 2001). Standardized achievement tests measuring reading, math and science for third grade students show that students who attend a full-day kindergarten program receive higher scores than the children who do not attend a full-day program (Schroeder, 2006). During their kindergarten year, students who attend a full-day kindergarten program are 17 percent ahead of the half-day students on math and reading tests. In grades one and two, the full-day students are 15 points ahead of the half-day students on reading and math tests (Ackerman et al., 2005).

Who Will Benefit from Full-Day Kindergarten?

There are groups that can benefit from attending a full-day program. Albrecht and Carnes (2007) suggest that children from "disadvantaged backgrounds" (p. 65) will benefit from full-day kindergarten because their attendance is higher, which gives them more opportunities to work on academic and social skills. Children who typically have poor attendance, have more chances to participate in the school's curriculum if they attend a full-day program (Schroeder, 2007). One study found that children in low socioeconomic areas, special needs, single parent families, or schools with a transient community could benefit from a full-day kindergarten program (Bell & da Costa, 2001). In addition, children who live in a dual-income family could also benefit from attending a full-day kindergarten program (Martinez et al., 2006). Children who live in poverty, who

can also be transient students, and not attend school regularly, can benefit from an all day program, because they are in school for a full day instead of part of a day (Schroeder, 2007).

The Views of the Teachers

Kindergarten teachers who were interviewed felt that the full-day kindergarten program was less rushed. The teachers were able to get to know the children and parents better because they spent more time with them. The teachers said that they gave more individualized instruction. Another result of spending more time with the students was that kindergarten teachers could expand on the curriculum, giving the children more opportunities to learn about a topic. These teachers also felt that an all-day every-day program prepared the children better for first grade. (Carter, Creswell, & deAlba, 2004).

Some kindergarten teachers felt that the half-day kindergarten program was less stressful for the children. They felt that the full-day program pushed the children too hard. They also shared that extending the day was similar to offering daycare in the kindergarten (Carter et al., 2004). Other supporters of a half-day program thought that children's attention spans were more appropriate for a half-day program. They also thought that children become too tired in an all-day program (Martinez, et al., 2006).

The Views of the Parents

Some parents think that more time in the classroom means that their child will receive a more formal academic day instead of a developmentally appropriate day for a kindergarten student (Martinez et al., 2006).

The parents of children in the full-day program felt that their children had more time to explore and learn. Parents said that they were able to get to know their child's

teacher better since the children were with their teacher all-day, every-day. The parents also felt that the full-day classroom was more relaxed, and prepared their child better for first grade. Parents, who work outside the home, appreciated having their child in one place all day, instead of having them go to a new location for daycare in the middle of the day (Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 2005). Parents of children in the full-day program said that their children “experienced a great deal of growth in kindergarten”, and also that they were “satisfied with their child’s curriculum” (Ackerman, Barnett & Robin, 2005, p.8).

Curriculum

Appropriate curriculum for a full-day program does not involve a more academic day, but a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Some components of an appropriate curriculum include meaningful topics, time to explore and experience learning, higher order thinking, time for activities that are chosen by the child and time for activities that are chosen by the teacher, and the importance of play. Teachers facilitate learning through mixed-ability groups and emphasize language development and pre-literacy skills. Small-group, large-group, and individual activities are all included in the curriculum (Martinez et al., 2006). While the outcomes for the full-day program and the half-day program are the same, the full-day teachers reported having more time to work with the students individually, than the teachers did in a half-day program (SAEE, 2005). For example, in a full day program, 80 percent of teachers spend more than 30 minutes each day on math. In a half-day program, 50 percent of teachers spend more than 30 minutes each day on math. There is a gap with teaching reading also. Sixty-eight percent of students in full-day and 37 percent in half-day programs spent 60 minutes on reading

daily (Ackerman, et al., 2005). Ackerman et al. (2005), state that “Reading aloud is a critical activity in helping to develop children’s reading skills” (p. 6). Yet, 62 percent of teachers in a half-day kindergarten program read to their students daily compared to 79 percent of teachers who teach a full-day program (Ackerman et al., 2005). Kindergarten students spend more time on reading and math activities in a full-day program, compared to a half-day program. In addition to academic skills, social skills are also emphasized in kindergarten.

Social Advantages

In a full-day kindergarten program, there is more time to focus on social skills. An appropriate kindergarten curriculum includes conflict resolution and works to develop the social skills of the children. This can be accomplished by providing a nurturing environment for the children. Being in a kindergarten environment more than 2 hours per day gives children, especially those who are disadvantaged, extra time to practice social skills. The children who attend a full-day kindergarten program are more independent, and interact more positively with their peers (Martinez et al., 2006). Clark states that children make more progress with social skills when they attend a full-day kindergarten program. Children in a full-day program have more opportunities to socialize with other children, and are able to make greater positive gains with social skills than children who attend a half-day program (Clark, 2001).

Research Methods

There are several types of methods used in the research of full-day and half-day kindergarten programs. Most studies use a mixed methods approach. This consists of quantitative research, which ranges from a pre and post- test, to standardized assessment

instruments (Bell, 2001). In addition to these methods, Martinez et al. (2006) add report cards, classroom observation, and pre-kindergarten screening as data collection tools.

Research is also conducted as semi-structured parent and teacher interviews (Bell & da Costa, 2001) and questionnaires (Antifaeff et al., 2006).

Conclusion

In order to meet the needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, transient communities and single parent and double income families, full-day kindergarten is offered in many school districts. Martinez, et al. (2006) state that children in full-day programs show “greater gains” than those in half-day kindergarten programs.

Kindergarten students can benefit not only academically, but also socially when they attend a full-day kindergarten program. Teachers have views to support both full-day kindergarten and half-day kindergarten. However, the majority of teachers and parents support the full-day kindergarten program. In addition, parents who support the program “believe the full-day program should be voluntary” (Martinez et al., 2006, p. 4). The teachers of children in a full-day program who were interviewed state that they do not feel as hurried to “accomplish kindergarten objectives” (Martinez et al., 2006, p. 3). They also report being able to know the children and parents better and feel that the extra time they spend with children help them to show more growth both academically and socially.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This chapter includes information about the purpose, participants, data gathering, data handling, and the general research design for this study. The purpose of this mixed methods study is to determine the motivators and reasons parents use to select a specific kindergarten program for their children. Program choices typically include all-day every-day, alternate-day, and half-day kindergarten. This study includes questionnaires filled out by the parents of 138 kindergarten students in one rural and one city school in the same school district.

There are two elementary schools in this district. One school contains two sections of kindergarten. These are alternate-day kindergarten sections. The other school offers six sections of kindergarten. There are two all-day every-day and four alternate-day sections in the second school. Half-day kindergarten is not offered in either school.

In this school district 34 children attend a full-day kindergarten program, while 104 attend an alternate-day kindergarten program. The all-day every-day program consists of attending school five days a week, all day for six hours each day. In the alternate-day program students attend school on Mondays and Wednesdays for six hours each day, or Tuesdays and Thursdays for six hours each day. These students also attend every other Friday for six hours.

Setting and Participants

The research takes place in a school district with 1740 students in northeast Minnesota located near Duluth. It has 486 students in an urban K-5 school, and 138 students in a rural K-2 school. The city school was made up of 94% Caucasian students.

Fifteen percent of the students in this school attended special education classes, and 35% received free or reduced lunches. In the rural school, 96% of the students were Caucasian, 7% of the students in this school attended special education classes, and 20% received free or reduced lunches.

This school district was chosen for this study because the researcher currently works in the city school that participated in the study. The families were chosen to participate in this study because they most recently made a kindergarten program choice for their children. Questionnaires and consent forms were sent home in February 2010 to all parents in this school district with a child who is attending kindergarten at either elementary school. A sample questionnaire was not sent home out of respect for the parents' busy schedules and the belief that to do so was asking too much of parents and perhaps bias them against this research project.

The district includes two elementary schools with 138 kindergarten children enrolled in eight sections. Parents showed consent by filling out the questionnaire and returning it to school in their child's backpack. Upon receiving the completed questionnaire, teachers either sent them to the researcher in a sealed envelope through inter school mail, or put them in the researcher's staff mailbox at the appropriate school.

It was not necessary to obtain a list of kindergarten families. Questionnaires were given to each teacher to send home with all kindergarten students based on how many students were enrolled in her class. The questionnaires were sent home with kindergarten students in their daily folders. This is an effective and common way to communicate with families of kindergarten students. All kindergarten teachers in each school in the district

send daily folders home with their students. The families take the contents out of the folders daily, and also put any information they are sending to school in these folders.

The names of the families are not linked to the questionnaires in order to maintain confidentiality and avoid bias. By making this effort to maintain confidentiality, parents will be encouraged to share their true thoughts. Because this is a voluntary study, it is possible that the questionnaires that are returned will be skewed by families who have strong opinions one way or the other. However, because it is convenient for parents, and a habit to return school communication in the folder, families are likely to return the questionnaires in their children's folders.

The questionnaire was sent to all families instead of just a sample, because of the small number of possible participants in this study. Sending the questionnaire to all possible participants yields a higher response rate and gives the researcher more details about how the families made their program choices for their children.

Participation in this study was voluntary. In response to the questionnaires sent home, questionnaires were returned, indicating their willingness to participate in this study. No external incentives were provided for the return of questionnaires.

In December 2009, the IRB approved this study, the questionnaire and letter to be sent home for parents to fill out and return. A copy of a letter of consent, the questionnaire the participants were asked to fill out and a letter of authorization from the elementary principal are included in Appendices A, B, and C. See Appendix D for the IRB approval letter.

Research Design

The questionnaire consists of open-ended and closed questions. Cohen (2007) recommends starting the questionnaire by being more general and moving on to more specific questions. Based on this, the questionnaire begins with closed questions, and moves on to open-ended questions, which require more time. The closed questions are analyzed using statistics (Cohen, 2007). When possible, 95% likely confidence intervals will be constructed to compare the proportions of students in each program based on: gender, age, and preschool attendance. The t-test for proportionality will be utilized as appropriate, if needed.

The closed questions on the questionnaires are used to identify patterns in the responses of the participants. An important question is to determine why families choose one kindergarten program over the other. What factors affect their choice? What is the influence of age, sex, preschool attendance, daycare, or work schedule on the program choice families make for their child? Will it show results that all-day every-day kindergarten was not an option at the rural school because not enough parents signed up their children so that the program would pay for itself? These variables are chosen by the researcher based on 16 years of teaching experience and informal discussions with parents, teachers and administrators.

According to Cohen (2007), “Open-ended questions can be useful if the possible answers are unknown or if the questionnaire is exploratory” (p.321).. The purpose of this research project is to learn why the parents choose one program over the other. Therefore, open-ended questions appropriately give insight into how each participant decides which program to enroll their child in. However, Cohen (2007) states that “open questions can

lead to irrelevant and redundant information” (p.321), so the questions are phrased to make sure the participants do not feel that they are repeating themselves when they answer questions.

Another consideration is readability. Cohen (2007) encourages researchers to “avoid highbrow questions even with sophisticated respondents” (p. 334). One goal of this questionnaire is to make it convenient and comfortable for the participants to use. The questionnaire is written to be as “uncomplicated as possible,” easy to read, one page, and on “high quality paper” (Cohen, 2007, p. 338).

Open-ended questions were sorted into two categories based on the selected kindergarten program. On a question by question basis, each group’s open-ended responses were read and analyzed to identify common responses to the questions. The responses were sorted, grouped, quantified, and then common responses between the all-day and alternate-day programs were compared to see if any patterns, indicators, or influences emerge.

Summary

A review of the information collected from the returned questionnaires will be discussed in Chapter Four. The closed questions will be analyzed with statistical methods. The open-ended questions will be analyzed by reading and then organizing responses into categories. These categories can then be analyzed to identify possible reasons for the parents’ choice of kindergarten program.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Out of the 138 questionnaires sent to the families of alternate-day and all-day every-day kindergarten students, 81 were returned. Out of 104 students, 55 responses were returned from families with alternate-day kindergarten students (ALT). Of the 34 students enrolled, the remaining 26 responses were from families with kindergarten students in the all-day-every-day program (ADED).

Data was gathered from the school district enrollments to examine and compare the genders of the students in the programs. In the ADED program, 18 of the 34 students were boys and there were 16 girls or 53% and 47% respectively. The 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for the proportions of ADED boys and girls were [36, 70] and [30, 64] respectively. Further, 53 of the 104 students in ALT were boys and there were 51 girls or 51% and 49% respectively. The 95% CIs for the proportions of ALT boys and girls were [41, 61] and [39, 59] respectively. Since the gender confidence intervals are overlapping between the programs, no significant difference at the 95% level can be found between the proportions of boys and girls enrolled in the ADED and ALT programs.

Does attending zero, one, two or three years of preschool affect which program the parents choose? The families were asked the number of years their children attended preschool, if at all. This possible impact of the number of years the children attended preschool was analyzed using results from the questionnaire responses. Table 1 compares the years of preschool attended for students in the ADED and ALT programs. When possible, 95% confidence intervals were calculated for the proportions. Since all

available confidence intervals were overlapping, there were no significant differences in the proportions of students in ADED or ALT based on years of preschool attended.

Table 1

ADED and ALT Proportions by Preschool Attendance

Years	ADED n = 26			ALT n = 55		
	n	%	95% CI	n	%	95% CI
0	2	8		17	31	[19, 43]
1	14	54	[35, 73]	15	27	[15, 39]
2	6	23	[7, 39]	19	35	[22, 48]
3	3	12		2	4	

Note. CI=confidence interval.

Table 2 examines the proportions in a slightly different way. Table 1 compares the makeup of the programs. Table 2 compares the program choice made for each group defined by years of preschool attendance for all 81 responses. There is a significant difference between the proportions of students with zero years of preschool and the program selected by the families. In particular, the majority of students with no preschool experience were enrolled in the ALT program. There is no significant difference for the proportions of students with one year of preschool and the program chosen. There is a significant difference between the proportions of students with two years of preschool experience. The majority of students with two years of preschool experience enrolled in the ALT program.

Table 2

Preschool Attendance Proportions by Program Choice

Years	n	ADED %	ALT %	ADED 95% CI	ALT 95% CI
0	19	11	90	[0, 33]	[78, 100]
1	29	48	52	[30, 66]	[34, 70]
2	25	24	76	[7, 41]	[59, 93]
3	5	60	40		

Note. CI=confidence interval.

The families were asked when their children's birthdays were in order to determine if families were choosing one program or the other based on the age of their children. The ages in months of students enrolled in the ADED and ALT programs were compared from the questionnaire responses with $n = 26$, $M = 70.11$, $s = 4.77$, 95% CI [67.99, 72.23]; and $n = 55$, $M = 70.67$, $s = 3.87$, and 95% CI [69.59, 71.75] respectively. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the ages of the students in the ADED and ALT programs.

Items six through ten on the questionnaire were open-ended questions. The most common responses were included here along with the percent of parents giving that or similar responses. Likewise, groups with similar responses and percentages are also included. Quotes for typical responses are included to increase the validity of this report and reduce bias in this more subjective type of analysis.

Item six on the questionnaire is an open-ended question: "Why did you choose your child's program?" The families were asked this question in an open-ended format so they would have the opportunity to share their decision making process. On this question,

46% of the responses from the ADED students focused on consistency, daily learning, structure and good foundation. Some comments included: “We thought the consistency of everyday kindergarten would be beneficial,” “Everyday benefits her desire to learn even more every day” and children who, “needed more help.” The next most common response, 31%, related to the child’s readiness, maturity, enjoyment, or successful preschool experiences: “loved preschool,” “did well,” “used to it,” “mature enough,” and “seemed ready.” Another 23% were specific about the “lack of confusion” in the child’s daily and weekly schedule.

For item six the majority of responses from families in the ALT program, 53%, cited cost as a factor. Some of these comments included: “ADED is too expensive.” and “The Alternate Day Program is free.” The next most common responses, 13%, were related to the rigor of the ADED program: “overwhelming,” “it took my child a bit to get used to 3 days a week” and “not ready to be gone all day every day.” Another 7% of responses were quite similar but indicated parents found the program unnecessary at this point: “2-3 days is enough” and my child is “quite advanced and won’t be missing out on anything yet.” A group of 11% of the respondents complained that ALT was chosen because ADED was not available in the nearest building. “Good transition” was reported by 9%. “Mom is home” or “this schedule works for us” was reported by another 9%. Finally, 7% stated comments like “he is only little once” or “I didn’t want him to be gone daily.”

Item seven was designed to identify reasons families opposed the program they did not choose: “Why didn’t you choose the other program?” In the largest group of responses from ADED families, 46% cited additional time learning or time as school as

preferential: ADED “does not have days off” or ALT was “not enough days at school.” Another parent wrote “the programs are not the same education” and another stated they “wanted the extra learning.” These comments are reinforced by Martinez et al. (2006), who report that students who attend a full-day kindergarten receive greater academic benefits than children who attend a half-day program. Another 31 % found the ALT schedule too difficult or confusing. In a study by Carter et al. (2004), similar findings were stated about a half-day program, “half-day programs include the disruption of a child’s schedule” (p. 5). Fifteen percent of families cited their work schedules. Twelve percent of families found ADED to be a “natural step up” from previous experiences. “My child wanted this one” or other similar responses occurred on 12% of responses.

At 70%, cost was the most prohibitive reason for choosing the ALT over ADED program for families. Twenty-six percent of ALT families stated that the ADED program required “too many days” to be age appropriate. Eight percent of respondents cited that ADED was not needed or necessary for their child. Another 8% stated ADED was not available to them.

Item eight was designed to determine if daycare arrangements were a factor in program selection. Even though a report by the Long Beach Unified School District (2000) reports that a full-day kindergarten program will provide "child care relief for full-time working parents" (p. 2), this did not match with the findings in this report. For ADED families, 65% indicated that daycare arrangements had no impact on program choice. Another 12% of ADED families noted ADED was cheaper than daycare. For ALT families, 79% stated that daycare arrangements had no impact on program choice.

Another 6% of ALT families stated that the cost of ADED and daycare were too expensive as these families would need to pay for both.

Item nine was designed to measure the impact of families' work schedule on their program choice. For ADED families, 67% of the families indicated that work schedule had no impact while 38% commented that ADED “fit our work schedules,” or other similar comments. For ALT families, 78% stated work schedule made no impact and 6% responded with comments like “the flexibility matched my needs.”

Respondents were invited to share other comments in item ten. For ADED families the most common additional comments were positives such as, “better to have routine,” or “really happy with daily structure.” These responses occurred in 27% of the sample. Also, 15% of families stated the previous siblings were in ADED or that later siblings would enroll in ADED.

Responses for item ten for families in the ALT program were quite varied. However, 20% stated ADED should be free. Another 7% wanted the ADED program to be offered in their building.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore why parents chose the alternate-day kindergarten or the all-day every-day program for their children. A questionnaire was sent home with the children, which the parents sent back to school upon completion. The questionnaire included questions that gave insight on why they made their choices. The researcher hoped this information would help answer the question that parents of incoming kindergarten students ask: “Which program should I choose for my child?”

Educational Implications

According to findings in Table 2, a child who attended a preschool program for zero or two years was most likely signed up for the alternate-day program. However, if a child attended preschool for one year, there was no significant difference in which program the children were enrolled. This shows that the alternate-day teachers have a group of students in their classes with a wide range of preschool experiences. However, Table 2 shows that the teachers of the all-day every-day program have a group of students with mostly similar preschool experiences. It is important for teachers to be aware that students in the alternate-day program have been exposed to school experiences at a wide range of levels. The children who entered the alternate-day program typically had anywhere from zero to two years of preschool experience. This should be taken into consideration, as it makes planning lessons difficult when the abilities of the children are so varied. Is it possible that first grade could be more challenging for a child with zero years of preschool experience who attended the alternate-day program? The all-day

every-day teachers had mostly students with one year of preschool, which shows that most of the students who attended this program had similar exposure to preschool skills.

According to the parent responses, 70% of alternate-day parents chose that program because the cost of all-day every-day was too high. Cost was the single most deciding factor for program choice. Other information gained from the questionnaire was that the parents are not using the age or gender of their children to decide which program to place their child in. In addition, the families in both programs felt that their work schedules were not the deciding factor in why they chose their child's program.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since cost is such an important influence for program choice, is there a way to help parents with the cost so they can send their children to get the education that they feel is important for their child? What if daycare before and after school is included in the cost? If this daycare option is only offered to all-day every-day students, it could encourage families to select this program for their children.

The majority of the children who attended preschool for zero years are going from alternate-day kindergarten into a full time first grade classroom, with no prior preschool experience. It is important to study if there is an effect on the learning of these children compared to the children who attended preschool, and/or all-day every-day kindergarten. In addition, there is a need to study the success of children in first grade who did not attend preschool.

In the literature review in this paper, there is research included about half-day kindergarten programs, but little was found on alternate-day programs. This study that

included alternate-day kindergarten programs is not nearly enough for a complete body of knowledge of alternate-day programs.

In future studies, it may be helpful to ask families if their children's age influenced which program they chose for their children. Further, color coding the questionnaires would have been helpful in order to compare the responses from each of the two schools.

Conclusions

Parents of kindergarten students consider the cost of the all-day every-day program to be the most significant factor in their decision as to where to place their child. Work schedules and daycare arrangements did not affect their decisions significantly. The ages and genders of the students did not impact their program selection. It is worth noting that students with zero or two years of preschool were significantly more likely to be placed in the alternate-day program.

The impact of either program on each of these groups of students and their future learning in particular needs to be more carefully studied. In addition, the body of knowledge about the alternate-day kindergarten programs needs to be more fully developed.

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**Appendix A:
CONSENT FORM
Kindergarten Program Choice**

My name is Jill Brenner, and I am a kindergarten teacher in your child's school district. I am enrolled in a graduate program at UMD, and I am doing a research project.

I would like to find out how families decide which program to enroll their child in: All-Day-Every-Day, or Alternate-Day kindergarten. If you would like to participate, please fill out the attached questionnaire, and return it to your child's teacher in the envelope provided.

Purpose: To find out how families choose between the All-Day-Every-Day, and Alternate-Day kindergarten programs.

If you participate, you will be asked to: Fill out the attached questionnaire.

The time required for participation: 10-15 minutes

Risks: There are no foreseen risks for participating in this study.

Benefits: Your participation will help the researcher to better understand how parents choose a kindergarten program for their child.

Confidentiality: Questionnaires will be kept in a locked file cabinet and available only to the researcher.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and there will be no penalty for choosing not to participate.

If you have any questions concerning this study, please feel free to contact:

Jill Brenner, kindergarten teacher	Phone: 218-628-4949 ext. 2039 Email: jbrenner@proctor.k12.mn.us
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Kim Riordan, UMD supervisor	Phone: 218-726-7251 Email: kriordan@d.umn.edu
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If you have further questions, please contact: Research Subjects' Advocate line: 612-625-1650, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I will show my consent to participate in this study by returning the questionnaire filled out in the envelope provided.

Appendix B:
Questionnaire for Kindergarten Program Choice

1. Which program is your child enrolled in?

☐ Alternate-Day kindergarten ☐ All-Day-Every-Day kindergarten

2. My child is a ☐ boy ☐ girl

3. How old is your child? _____

4. When is your child's birthday? _____

month, day, year

5. Did your child attend preschool?

☐ no ☐ yes How many years? ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3

6. Why did you choose your child's program?

7. Why didn't you choose the other program?

8. How did your child's daycare arrangements affect which program you chose?

9. How did your work schedule affect which program you chose?

10. Are there any other comments you would like to share?

Appendix C:



BAY VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
8708 VINLAND STREET
DULUTH, MN 55810
218-628-4949

Dear Barbara,

This letter is to notify you that I am fully aware of the questionnaire Jill Brenner will be sending to parents. We have gone over the questions and I feel she will gather some valuable information from the results. I also went over the consent form Jill is sending out with the questionnaire and I feel she has covered all necessary areas.

Even though this is on Bay View letterhead, I am also the principal at Caribou Lake Elementary School and I understand Jill will be sending the questionnaire to Caribou Lake parents as well.

This project will be interesting to see the results as she is working in her M.Ed. program. If there are other areas I can assist Jill, I am more than happy to help her out.

Sincerely,

Jon Larson
Principal
Bay View Elementary

Appendix D:

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2

SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS: STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS;
OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

Study Number: 0912E74857

Principal Investigator: Jill Brenner

Title(s): Alternate Day Kindergarten or Full Day Kindergarten. How do parents choose?

This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota RSPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter. This secure electronic notification between password protected authentications has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature. The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office. Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

SURVEY OR INTERVIEW RESEARCH APPROVED AS EXEMPT UNDER
THIS CATEGORY IS LIMITED TO ADULT SUBJECTS.

This exemption is valid for five years from the date of this correspondence and will be filed inactive at that time. You will receive a notification prior to inactivation. If this research will extend beyond five years, you must submit a new application to the IRB before the study's expiration date. Upon receipt of this email, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-5654. You may go to the View Completed section of eResearch Central at <http://eresearch.umn.edu/> to view further details on your study. The IRB wishes you success with this research.

This message was sent using the University of Minnesota Duluth Webmail